THE DEVELOPMENT OF ANGLO-SAXON IDENTITY THROUGH NARRATIVE AND LITERARY SOURCES

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF ANGLO-SAXON IDENTITY DURING LATE ANTIQUITY THROUGH NARRATIVE AND LITERARY SOURCES

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ABSTRACT

During Late Antiquity, the Germanic peoples of the successor states formed new ethnic identities across Europe that ultimately became the basis for the organization of their states. Understanding how these groups formed new ethnic identities is important for contemporary understandings of ethnicity and the issues that can surround this topic. The goal of this thesis is to analyze how ethnic identity is formed as well as how it was used by peoples and states in Late Antiquity. The first section develops a framework for identity formation using historical and anthropological research, with the second applying this framework to selected external sources, *The History of the Franks* by Gregory of Tours and the writings of Gregory the Great. The final section looks at internal sources, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* by Bede and the *Old English Elegies*, to analyze how the Anglo-Saxons themselves constructed an ethnic identity.

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PREFACE

The formation of ethnic identity, or ethnogenesis, is an integral component to understanding any culture. How a people construct their identity is contingent upon a variety of factors, but one of the most important issues to keep in mind is the fact that it is something that does not exist on its own. People are not born with an awareness of ethnic differences; rather, they learn these by participating in cultural frameworks created as a result and method of defining a collective identity.[1] Groups create their identity, both consciously and unconsciously, through the deliberate use of symbols and traditions and by identifying themselves as distinct from others. The construction of ethnic identities inevitably divides society into groups of "us" and "them."[2] While these lines can at times be fluid, they are often the method by which groups organize themselves politically. One method of both constructing and demonstrating an identity is through the written word.[3] How people write about themselves, or how others write about them, delineates ethnic boundaries and indicates just what characteristics and values are accepted and important to each group. While these internal and external works may differ in many ways, they are at the same time influencing one another and contributing to the overall construction of a collective identity. By analyzing

[1] Walter Pohl, "Introduction: Strategies of Distinction" in *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities 300-800* edited by Walter Pohl and Helmut Reimitz (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 8-9, 11.

[2] Nira Yuval-Davis, "Theorizing identity: beyond the 'us' and 'them' dichotomy," *Patterns of Prejudice* 44, no. 3 (2010), 261-280. doi: 10.1080/0031322X.2010.489736

[3] Pohl, "Introduction," 8-11.

what is included and what is excluded in a particular group's narrative and literary sources, and attempting to piece together the motivations behind this information, one can form a better picture of the ethnic identity of a people.

Understanding ethnic identities as they were constructed during the Late Antique and Early Medieval Period is integral to understanding broader historical trends and conflicts, particularly for Europe. The scholarship on ethnogenesis is grounded in the study of the Germanic tribes of Late Antiquity, as it was during this time that ethnic identities became the basis for the organization of states.[4] There have been several different trends in the literature on ethnic identity formation, from Reinhard Wenskus' concept of *traditionskern*, whereby the barbarian tribes that contributed to the decline of the Roman Empire are seen as a small group of people guarding a core of traditions, to Patrick Geary's claim that ethnicity is a 'situational construct.'[5] Debates about how to define ethnicity inevitably arise in this discourse, as the term is subjective and ambiguous, at best. Accordingly, developing a criteria for evaluating ethnicity has been rather difficult, because a group's ethnicity may be founded upon certain pillars (religion, history, or culture) while another group may identify around different concepts. Walter Pohl provides what he calls a "subjective definition" to define ethnicity, however loosely: "ethnicity is a form of community based on a shared belief in common origin."[6] Although a more in-depth discussion of how we should define ethnicity,

[4] Ibid., 5.

[5] See Guy Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 13-19 for a brief discussion of some of the key scholars and trends in ethnogenesis scholarship.

[6] Pohl, "Introduction," 9.

and the problems associated with doing just this, is provided below, much of the analysis in this thesis is based upon Pohl's criteria of a "shared history."

One of the aims of the first part of this thesis has been to establish a workable framework of ethnicity that can be applied to literature. This framework is interdisciplinary in nature, pulling from the fields of history as well as anthropology and psychology. Although the thesis is focusing on a Germanic group of Late Antiquity, the concepts that surround ethnic identity formation can easily be applied to more modern trends and issues, which is demonstrated by the inclusion of multidisciplinary works by various authors. Much of the extant ethnogenesis scholarship does not include anthropology or psychology, nor the frameworks for understanding ethnic identity that these fields provide. Due to this fact, this research provides a relatively unexplored and unique perspective on the development of ethnic identity during Late Antiquity, applying more modern concepts from these social sciences to that period of time.

The other core part of this thesis rests on an analysis of narrative and literary works either by or about the Anglo-Saxons, particularly during the formative years of that group's ethnic identity, focusing roughly on the fifth through the eighth centuries AD. Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* and the *Old English Elegies* were used for primary internal sources because they fell into this time frame, in addition to the fact that they are consciously constructing an identity. Works such as *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and *Beowulf* were not used simply because they were not within the time frame that is the focus

of this study.[7] A key part of this thesis develops a view of the Anglo-Saxons as seen through the eyes of the Franks, a contemporary Germanic group. While many works on the Anglo-Saxons exist, they have not often been viewed through the eyes of the Franks, one of their closest neighbors, a fact that this research seeks to remedy in part. Gregory of Tours' *History of the Franks* is the basis for this analysis, and the writings of Gregory the Great provide another external point-of-view on the Anglo-Saxons.

In general, perhaps the key work for framing a lot of the information and analysis in this paper was archaeologist Guy Halsall's *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568*. His book provided a clear and frank discussion of the conditions of the Late Antique Roman world, as well as a good review of the archaeological evidence for the various Germanic tribes that set up the successor states. Trends in Anglo-Saxon scholarship are laid out in *Anglo-Saxonism and the Construction of Social Identity*, a collection of works that indicates how the study of the Anglo-Saxons has been influenced by various historical processes, especially nationalism.[8] R.A. Markus' *Gregory the Great and His World* was also exceptionally useful for contextualizing much of the life and writing of the pope, which

[7] James Campbell, Eric John, and Patrick Wormald, *The Anglo-Saxons* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1982), 26-27, 54, and 128. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* was compiled *circa* 892, placing it well outside the purview of this paper. The debate concerning the original composition of *Beowulf* continues to rage. The traditional view that the poem was composed in the eighth or ninth century has been challenged, with modern scholarship tending to date it much later than this.

[8] *Anglo-Saxonism and the Construction of Social Identity*, edited by Allen J. Frantzen and John D. Niles (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), Ebook. See Frantzen and Niles, "Introduction: Anglo-Saxonism and Medievalism," 1-14 for a broad outline of the trends in Anglo-Saxon scholarship, particularly how the "idea" of the Anglo-Saxons has been used throughout history as a way of justifying various concepts, including nationalism and slavery.

without context could easily be misconstrued or misunderstood.[9] Not only does this study utilize the fields of psychology, sociology, and anthropology in its analysis of Anglo-Saxon ethnogenesis, it also pulls from different sub-disciplines within history, including material culture and church history.

The core idea of this thesis is how the Anglo-Saxons were seen by their own people as well as outsiders, and fitting these components into the idea of an "English" ethnic identity. These categories do not exist naturally, and understanding the processes of their formation as well as how such an identity is asserted and maintained, specifically through literature, is the ultimate question this paper seeks to answer.

[9] R.A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

CHAPTER I

ETHNICITY

The formation of an ethnic identity is a complex process, with many different forces at work over a period of time that influence and, at times, force people to band together, uniting as a group with a common root against some external threat. Often these groups will arise out of periods of turmoil, such as after the breakup of the Western Roman Empire. The different Germanic groups that flooded into the previously Roman-controlled territories were pushed out by more hostile forces to the east, namely the Huns, that forced them westward in search of safer lands on which to build their lives. Indeed, the period of time from Late Antiquity into the early Middle Ages is an important era for the study of ethnogenesis, because the formation of ethnic groups happened on such a large scale in contrast to the era of Roman dominance.[10] The Roman Empire, by its very nature, was inclusive in the sense that due to its vast expanse it encompassed people of varying backgrounds and cultures.[11] What linked people across the empire was the control of the Roman state, and for many, a driving desire to become a Roman citizen. Under Rome, people were not, for the most part, judged by their ethnic identity. Rather they were assigned significance based on what they could offer the state and the ways they could aid in its success. Ethnic backgrounds, then,

[10] See Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, 35-62; Walter Pohl and Helmut Reimitz, eds., *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities 300-800* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); and Walter Pohl and Gerda Heydemann, eds., *Strategies of Identification: Ethnicity and Religion in Early Medieval Europe* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishing, 2013).

[11] See Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, 79-96 for a more in-depth discussion of the various portions of the western Empire, including Britain, Gaul, Iberia, Italy, and North Africa.

mattered little when there was a more important overarching framework within which an individual could be prosperous. That is not to say that individuals did not retain aspects of their heritage, nor that they were not proud of their backgrounds. Instead, however, social hierarchies and ways of attaining and maintaining power were based upon inclusion into the apparatus of the state, rather than participation in any particular ethnic group.

Identity construction of any kind, including ethnic identity, as mentioned above, is a complex and multifaceted process. It does not simply appear overnight; rather, several different factors contribute each layer until the entire whole has been created. Likewise, it does not remain static; something as complex and nuanced as ethnic identity is necessarily fluid, which also means that it is constantly evolving. One key point to keep in mind, however, is the fact that ethnicity does not inherently exist on its own. Humans have constructed the notion of ethnicity, much like they have constructed concepts of race; these words, by virtue of our modern understanding of what they entail, divide and organize society into distinct units. Beyond that, they often designate a value to the subgroups of each category. As anthropologist Anya Peterson Royce discusses, the definition of ethnicity as a group of people who share "common groups and customs… is comforting because it allows us to impose order on an otherwise complex and confusing phenomenal world."[12] This brings up further questions about just how to define the word 'ethnic': what characteristics should be used as the descriptive criteria? A quick survey of three different reference books provides insight into the common benchmarks: "pertaining to a people distinguished by race,

[12] Anya Peterson Royce, *Ethnic Identity: Strategies of Diversity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 19.

language, culture, etc.;" alternatively, "of or relating to a religious, national, or cultural group;" or, finally, "having a common national or cultural tradition; relating to race or culture."[13] Common trends seem to be race, religion, culture, and nationality, but the question is, are these acceptable criteria for distinguishing between groups of people? The modern conceptualizations of race, and the problems associated with them, are beyond the scope of this study, but it is enough to say that race is contextual, in that our understandings of what race really means in the modern world are shaped and developed by whatever unique social and historical trends have dominated our approach towards it.[14] Religion could perhaps be a useful delineating criteria, and certainly, as will be asserted later in this thesis, can be an integral defining characteristic around which a group forms and identifies themselves. Likewise, culture and nationality are starting points from which ethnicity can be studied, although all three of these concepts still lack definitiveness in defining an ethnic group. For instance, the shared Christian heritage stemming from the Middle Ages of various European countries does not inherently mean that each of them would identify as part of the same ethnic group. Rather it is the ways in which these countries used or continue to use

[13] *The Penguin Webster Handy College Dictionary*, 3rd ed. New York: Penguin, 2003; *Webster's II New College Dictionary*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1999; *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 8th ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.

[14] See, for example, Herbert W. Harris, Howard C. Blue and Ezra E.H. Griffith, *Racial and Ethnic Identity: Psychological Development and Creative Expression* (New York: Routledge, 1995) for a brief multidisciplinary survey of conceptions of race and ethnic identity. Harris points out that in the United States, the attempts to define and understand race are inextricably tied to the institution of slavery. Likewise, in Brazil, the strict caste system that was implemented while that country was a colony, which stratified people socially based partially upon their skin color, still exists today. Understandings of race, therefore, are inevitably and inextricably linked to a country's historical background, and therefore necessarily unique and complex.

Christianity to define themselves as separate from others, and the ways in which this shaped their history, that is useful. Similarly, a shared culture does not automatically equal a shared ethnicity; again, using medieval Europe as an example, the various Germanic tribes that overran the Western Roman Empire during Late Antiquity were roughly similar in culture but ultimately formed and identified as distinct groups. Nationality can be a starting point for the modern historian, but again, our conceptions of nationality are influenced by modern constructions, and geopolitical shifts can complicate matters even further.

All of this problematizing of the definition of ethnicity, and the criteria used to define it, may seem tedious, but it is essential to demonstrate the complexity surrounding the very idea and the caution with which any scholar should exercise when approaching it. That is not to say that religion, culture, and other characteristics cannot be used as descriptors of or contributors to ethnic identity; these things, however, should be understood not as broad signifiers but rather through the ways in which they are used, by "in-group" and "out-group" members, to define boundaries. Identity in general is incredibly complex, and ethnicity is just one component of an overarching framework for understanding ourselves and others, and through this, our place in the world. Things would be much simpler if ethnicity was a natural, fixed, clearly defined phenomenon, yet it is not, and should instead be understood as a human-constructed category that is ever-evolving, shaped by many different characteristics within a society. Anthropologists Cristina Moya and Brooke Scelza, when studying the concept of identity stability among different ethnic groups in Namibia, point out that the tendency of humans to view identity as stable is problematic by virtue of the various

interethnic migrations throughout human history.[15] To demonstrate their hypothesis that ethnic identity was not a fixed and unchangeable phenomenon, they analyzed a contemporary ethnic group, the Himba, pastoralists who broke off from the Herero tribe. In their study they analyzed Himba responses to the probable cultural assimilation of ethnic groups separate from their own, including the Damara. Despite being culturally more similar to the Herero and expressing more of an anti-Damara bias, the Himba saw the Damara as more likely to assimilate into and adopt Himba culture and identity than the Herero. Although there are some caveats that limit the general application of their research, Moya and Scelza concluded that identity construction, and the barriers that are built to delineate certain groups, are more fluid than is popularly believed.[16]

Further, ethnicity, as has been mentioned several times, is a construct and not something that inherently exists. People are not born knowing their ethnic identity; rather, they must learn what such a label means before they can demonstrate their adherence. They "must learn which traits correspond to which ethnic categories, how category membership can shift, with whom they should interact, and for what purposes they should do so," before they can properly navigate ethnic boundaries.[17] Additionally, ethnicity is just one way that societies organize themselves. As the historian Walter Pohl points out in an examination of early medieval ethnogenesis, "ethnic identity was not a natural condition but the result of social practice;" further, he asserts that "neither 'universal' nor 'ethnic' communities are the

[15] Cristina Moya and Brooke Scelza, "The Effect of Recent Ethnogenesis and Migration Histories on Perceptions of Ethnic Group Stability," *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 15, no. 1/2 (2015), 131-173.

[16] Ibid., 158 for a full discussion of some of the 'caveats' mentioned above.

[17] Ibid., 132.

'natural' way in which human society has to be organized."[18] Indeed, many of the ways in which modern societies model and define their ethnic boundaries can be traced back to this period of time, when the successor states to the Western Roman Empire were struggling to assert a new identity, based partially upon Roman traditions but also mixed with their own cultural backgrounds. Christianity later added another layer to this construction. The organization of society into ethnic units was the result of unique historical processes occurring at that time; as Pohl writes, "ethnic communities are not immutable biological or ontological essences, but the result of historical processes, or, as one might put it, historical processes in themselves."[19] Ethnicity was utilized during this period as a way to assert a new world order, after the unifying presence of the Roman Empire no longer exerted its authority over the huge swathes of population it once encompassed.

All of this discussion of ethnicity as a fluid construct is not intended to belittle its significance. Whether or not it is a human construct, and one that is rarely fixed and constantly evolving, may seem relatively insignificant when looking at the ways in which it is used to justify conflict between ethnic groups. Simply accepting that it is not the "natural" order of things does nothing to change the fact that most people today will identify, and often identify strongly, with a certain ethnic group. Further, ethnic tensions can cause many problems within societies and even lead to wide scale conflicts. In fact, psychologist George A. De Vos writes that because ethnic groups do not neatly and permanently fall into a fixed position along a horizontally or vertically stratified hierarchy, the very concept of "ethnicity

[18] Walter Pohl, "Introduction," in *Strategies of Distinction*: 11, 14.
[19] Ibid., 8.

can be a source of considerable conflict."[20] Ethnic groups that are in the majority may make it more difficult for minority groups to assimilate into their own, thereby denying the minority groups opportunities for advancement. The ways in which the minority groups then adapt their own culture and identities in response to these challenges can serve to further isolate them from the majority as well as cause even more tension between the groups.

There are more questions that we should propose before moving forward to how one asserts an ethnic identity. For example, how is an ethnic identity formed? What forces are at work that make possible the creation of such a category? And, perhaps more importantly, why are people willing to buy into the idea of ethnicity? As was mentioned above, the organization of societies based upon ethnicities was not the framework for the operation of the Roman Empire, nor is it a naturally-occurring phenomenon. People create and accept these identities; choosing to identify as a particular ethnic group is just that: a choice. If ethnicity, as a construct, does not exist on its own, then people must choose to accept it as a part of who they are. The question is under what circumstances and for what reasons do people acknowledge and accept it? Further, under what circumstances and for what reasons would such a category be created?

As far as how an ethnicity is formed, anthropologist Charles F. Keyes provides some insight. He writes that communities have a "genealogy" that is determined not by nature but

[20] George A. De Vos, "Ethnic Pluralism: Conflict and Accommodation, The Role of Ethnicity in Social History" in *Ethnic Identity: Creation, Conflict, and Accommodation*, 3rd ed., edited by Lola Romanucci-Ross and George A. De Vos (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1995), 16.

is "culturally constructed and historically contingent."[21] He goes on to say that these genealogies must be supported by some sort of authority: traditional authority, for example, listening to the words of one's ancestors, charismatic authority, wherein an individual is perceived to have some sort of quality that naturally places them in a leadership position, or hegemonic authority, where states, specifically modern states according to Keyes, create a new sense of community based upon new and old traditions.[22] De Vos writes that there are various reasons why an ethnic identity would be created: "consolidation and legitimization of political power; enhanced social status; or economic advantage."[23] Ethnicity is based upon the ideas of a shared past, of a "common origin, of common beliefs and values, and a common feeling of survival—in brief, a 'common cause.'"[24] Ethnicity is created by fomenting the idea of a shared history and sense of belonging, by differentiating one group from others based upon aspects that are unique to that particular group. In Late Antiquity, the period of focus for this study, ethnic identities were constructed for a variety of purposes, although in many cases consolidation and legitimization of political power is probably at the forefront. The Germanic groups that took over various parts of the Western Roman Empire did not come in and completely displace or outnumber the already-present populations. They simply composed a new elite over an incredibly diverse society; as Pohl points out, the barbarian kings of the fifth and sixth centuries ruled over populations of vastly different

[21] Charles F. Keyes, "Who are the Tai? Reflections on the Invention of Identities," in *Ethnic Identity: Creation, Conflict, and Accommodation*, 3rd ed., edited by Lola Romanucci-Ross and George A. De Vos (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1995), 137.

[22] Ibid.

[23] De Vos, "Ethnic Pluralism," 24.

[24] Ibid., 15.

origins, from the military elites to the civil population. In order to assert and maintain their political power, these leaders had to find ways to foster a sense of cohesion among these people, and ultimately "their polyethnic basis was transformed, at least notionally, into a singular ethnic identity, expressed in the name of the kingdom."[25]

The question regarding why people would self-identify with a particular ethnicity brings us to the fundamentals of human nature. The concept of ethnicity satisfies the very human psychological need to feel a sense of belonging, of having some sort of community with which one shares things in common. As De Vos writes, "ethnicity… is intimately related to the individual need for a collective continuity as a belonging member of some group."[26] Humans are induced by their very natures to band together, at the most basic level simply for survival, both physically and mentally.[27] Without other group members to help protect them or provide companionship, humans risk losing vital components of who they are and might struggle to place themselves in the world. Ethnicity is just one method that such a grouping, integral to our very makeup, can be initiated. A person's identity is multi-layered, but each component rests upon the concept of belonging to some group, whether that is gender, ethnicity, nationality, or something else. By identifying characteristics that people have in common, and differentiating these from other groups, people are able to foster a sense of membership and pride, accepting ethnic boundaries and maintaining them for the survival of the group as a whole. Even though ethnicity is constructed by humans, it serves to

[25] Pohl, *Strategies of Distinction*, 3.
[26] De Vos, "Ethnic Pluralism," 25.
[27] Ibid.

satisfy a very real psychological drive, and perhaps this accounts for its continuity and importance in the modern world.

An important aspect to note is that often the formation of ethnic identities, or at least renewed emphasis upon them, occurs during periods of unrest and turmoil. Again, the Germanic tribes during Late Antiquity provide an excellent example of this. Terms such as Ostrogoth and Visigoth, Frank and Anglo-Saxon, convey a sense of homogeneity about these groups when in reality they were often composed of several diverse groups that banded together or were subsumed by another group. They united for protection against an uncertain world, now that the authority they had depended upon to maintain order had ceased to do just that. A more modern example is provided by anthropologist Mary Kay Gilliland, who spent time in the former Yugoslavia during the early 1980s and again in the early 1990s. She writes that while there were ethnonationalist tensions undergirding society in the early 1980s, it was less of an issue in the country, as people generally got along fairly well. These tensions, while present, were not spoken about in public, and whenever she brought them up she was alternately subtly or explicitly told that such things were better left unspoken. While memories regarding the Second World War and animosity between Serbs and Croats lingered just under the surface, they were not usually discussed, and certainly not in public. However, after she came back in 1991, during the period of extreme unrest and violence in that part of the world, the situation had drastically changed. Rather than keeping ethnic and nationalistic thoughts and ideas to themselves, people began speaking of them openly, buying into and contributing to the overall culture of fear and hatred that political leaders were fostering to assist their own agendas of achieving power. As she writes, Serbian populations who were in

the minority in certain parts of Croatia blamed the Croats for their disadvantaged positions, and Croatians blamed Serbs in the lesser-developed parts of Yugoslavia for the country's overall economic decline. The tension, based upon ethnic and nationalistic differences and bolstered by long-held prejudices and distrust, played into the uncertainty of the era and ultimately erupted into an intense hatred that manifested itself in horrible violence.[28] Although this may seem like an extreme example, it illustrates the nature of identity formation, and ethnic identity formation in particular: during periods of turmoil and upheaval, when there is a lot of uncertainty about the future and one's place in the world, people turn to things that offer them a sense of stability and protection. In many cases, this is some aspect that strongly figures into their identity, including, often, their ethnicity.

Another important part of ethnic identity formation is drawing lines between groups, that is, identifying who is included within one's ethnic group versus who is not. This process occurs both with in-group members and out-group members, both of whom help define ethnic boundaries. "In-group" members do this by accepting and demonstrating accepted values or signifiers of identity, such as wearing certain clothing or speaking a certain language. Out-group members assist this process by accepting these practices as indicative of an ethnic identity separate from their own. This differentiation between ethnic groups is crucial to their formation and maintenance, and an integral aspect to getting people to accept the existence of such groups. Sociologist Nira Yuval-Davis points out that all identities are both inclusive and exclusive, and that the differentiation between self and non-self, or more

[28] Mary Kay Gilliland, "Nationalism and Ethnogenesis in the Former Yugoslavia," in *Ethnic Identity: Creation, Conflict, and Accommodation*, 3rd ed., edited by Lola Romanucci-Ross and George De Vos, (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1995), 197-221.

broadly, 'us' and 'others,' is a fundamental component of building an identity.[29] She goes further to point out that "whatever the significance for the construction of self-identity, the mere recognition that Others exist creates the need not only to assess in what ways and to what extent one is different from those Others but also for a decision, explicit or not, on how to treat those Others."[30] It is through this assessment and treatment of 'Others,' those who are distinct from you and the group you identify with, that ethnic identity is created, asserted, and maintained.

Now that the framework has been laid for the comprehension of just what ethnicity means, and how it is formed, it will be useful to examine some of the ways in which ethnic identity is asserted, particularly during Late Antiquity. As has been mentioned above, the organization of societies along newly evolving ethnic boundaries during the early Middle Ages after the transition of the Western Roman Empire is a particularly rich time for the study of ethnogenesis. Where before the unifying presence was the authority of the Roman state, now new boundaries were being drawn based on a shared background, real or carefully constructed, utilizing elements of religion, language, culture, and political authority. These new identity constructions were expressed in many different ways, each of them designed to foster a sense of belonging to a group that previously had not existed, or at the very least, had not been the basis for the organization of society. Importantly, although the Roman Empire as a state no longer exerted its authority over its previous territories in the west, these new kingdoms still looked to the traditions of Rome to legitimize their power. Erik Goosmann, in

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[29] Nira Yuval-Davis, "Theorizing identity: beyond the 'us' and 'them' dichotomy," *Patterns of Prejudice* 44, no. 3 (2010), 261-280. doi: 10.1080/0031322X.2010.489736

[30] Ibid., 274-275.

an examination of the tradition of Frankish kings retaining long hair, writes that modern research has begun to look at Merovingian kings, as well as their Carolingian successors, as more Romanized than they were previously given credit for being.[31] One area that particularly illustrates this point is the coinage used by the successor states in Western Europe. Several of the kingdoms that appeared across this area utilized imperial symbols on the coins that they issued as a way of asserting authority and legitimacy to their subjects. The Visigoths copied the coins of several emperors, including Tiberius II, Justinian and Justin II.[32] The Vandals, likewise, imitated the coinage of the Emperor Honorius, and the Suevi modeled their *tremisses* on that of Valentinian III.[33] These coins, rather than staying within the conquered territories of these successor states, circulated between the kingdoms with some even appearing in Anglo-Saxon Britain and influencing the coinage that would later be produced there. In particular, coins of the Merovingian Frankish kingdom had a strong influence on later Anglo-Saxon coinage.[34] In terms of asserting ethnic identity, the images of the kings depicted in a Roman style lent a sense of legitimacy to their claims of power, as they directly connected themselves to the power of Rome. Although the western portion of the empire may have ceased to exist politically, at least in the form it had for hundreds of

[31] Erik Goosmann, "The long-haired kings of the Franks: 'like so many Samsons?'," *Early Medieval Europe* 20, no. 3 (2012), 237.

[32] Manuel Castro Priego, "Absent Coinage: Archaeological Contexts and Tremisses on the Central Iberian Peninsula in the 7th and 8th Centuries AD," *Medieval Archaeology* 60, no. 1 (2016), 46. doi: 10.1080/00766097.2016.1147784

[33] Guido M. Berndt and Roland Steinacher, "Minting in Vandal North Africa: coins of the Vandal period in the Coin Cabinet of Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum," *Early Medieval Europe* 16, no. 3 (2008), 261.

[34] Rory Naismith, "Kings, crisis and coinage reforms in the mid-eighth century," *Early Medieval Europe* 20, no. 3 (2012), 300. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-0254.2012.00345.x

years, the very idea of Rome retained a strong grip on the imaginations of the successor states. By depicting themselves in an imperial manner upon their coinage, they were able to make a clear statement about the nature of their authority in a way that was familiar to their subjects.

Another unifying aspect for the successor states, and one that would be utilized very heavily in forging new ethnic identities, was Christianity. The religion had steadily grown in prominence for some time in the Empire starting with the Edict of Milan in 313 when it was officially legalized. Toward the end of the fourth century, Theodosius I, emperor of the Roman Empire, made orthodox Christianity the official state religion, further cementing its place as a powerful societal institution. The various Germanic tribes that set up the successor states in the west were familiar with Christianity, and indeed, most were converts to Arianism, a version of Christianity that had been declared heretical by the First Nicene Council in 325. Several different heresies cropped up in early Christianity, partially as a result of the institution being so heavily persecuted during these formative years. Prior to Christianity's legalization, Christians were brutally, though not consistently, persecuted in the empire, often used as scapegoats for other problems that the state was facing at any given moment. Diocletian's Great Persecution, which began in 303, is just one such example of Christians being imprisoned and executed for their faith. Indeed, early Christianity developed much of its early traditions from its centuries of persecution, when the ultimate act of devotion was to be martyred for one's faith. However, once Christianity was legalized, it quickly became apparent that there was little to no cohesion, doctrinal or otherwise, in the religion. In the years following the Edict of Milan, ecclesiastical leaders and Emperor

Constantine alike made an effort to create clear guidelines for the parameters of the religion, and in the process created orthodox Christianity. It was during the First Council of Nicaea, when much of the official doctrine of the church was laid out, that various heresies, including Arianism, were declared as outside the official teachings of the church.[35]

Religion can be an important source around which an ethnic identity is constructed. As De Vos writes, "for some groups, religious beliefs about their historical origin and past tribulations provide the vital definition of who they are."[36] This is certainly the case, as will be asserted more clearly below, with the Germanic tribes that overtook the western portion of Rome, including specifically the Franks and the Anglo-Saxons. For the Franks, their conversion to Roman Catholicism was used as a justification for their attacks on other groups, including and especially the Visigoths, as well as one more direct connection to Rome. A huge component of the Anglo-Saxon and later English identity revolved around Christianity and that group's history with the religion. Indeed, they asserted their connection to Rome by adhering to Catholicism and consciously distanced themselves from the Celts and that group's version of Christianity as a way of differentiating themselves and adding another layer to their ethnic identity.

Another important way for ethnic groups to assert and demonstrate their identities is through their literature. What authors from a particular era choose to write about their people and others, as well as what they choose to leave out, provides a wealth of insight into the

[35] Hanns Christof Brennecke, "Introduction: Framing the Historical and Theological Problems," in *Arianism: Roman Heresy and Barbarian Creed*, edited by Guido M. Berndt and Roland Steinacher (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), 1-19.

[36] De Vos, "Ethnic Pluralism," 22.

ways in which they perceived their world and the boundaries that divided the various groups that composed it. Their writings can either construct new boundaries or simply reiterate old ones, and serve as a way of "reminding" a group of their shared background. Reminding is in quotation marks because often, these shared backgrounds are made up or at the very least, heavily embellished to suit a particular narrative. As such, they are important tools for the formation, assertion, and overall sharpening of an ethnic identity. The following two sections view the Anglo-Saxons through the lens of narrative and literary sources, both external and internal, analyzing how contemporaries viewed them as well as how they viewed themselves.

CHAPTER II

EXTERNAL SOURCES, GREGORY OF TOURS AND POPE GREGORY THE GREAT

Studying the ethnogenesis of a particular group, because of the complexity of identity formation in general, is a difficult undertaking, but it can provide invaluable insights into modern conceptions of ethnicity and identity. As discussed above, this notion of 'us' and 'them,' of defining what it means to be part of specific groups, is one of the core components that goes into building an ethnic identity. In addition to studying the primary sources from the people in question, it is valuable to study how other, contemporary groups observed and differentiated them in their own literature and histories. For the ethnogenesis of the Anglo-Saxons this is particularly useful, as the group produced little of their own literature. Looking at the Anglo-Saxons through the lens of the Franks, a group that is simultaneously a contemporary and a newly formed ethnic group, provides a unique and untapped perspective on their ethnogenesis. Gregory of Tours wrote the *History of the Franks* in the late sixth century, with the work ending in the year 591.[37] Within his narrative Gregory refers to several different Germanic tribes with varying degrees of animosity or indifference, depending upon what suits his overall message. Among these he mentions the Saxons, and by analyzing the ways in which he referred to this group and contrasting that with how he discusses other groups—specifically, the Visigoths—we can draw some broader conclusions about how the Saxons were perceived. Additionally, analyzing the ways in which Pope

[37] Gregory, Bishop of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, translated by Lewis Thorpe (Baltimore: Penguin Classics, 1974), 16-21.

Gregory viewed the group, including the best way to evangelize them, provides further insight into how the Anglo-Saxons were perceived by outsiders.

Before moving forward with the *History of the Franks*, a note here on the nature of Late Antique Germanic tribal names will be useful. As has been discussed already, the period of instability that surrounded the demise and ultimate transition of the Western Roman Empire rippled far beyond the center of that state. The Romans had maintained relations with the barbarian tribes that settled the frontier for hundreds of years; indeed, the migrations of these peoples from the east contributed to the period of instability. However, while Germanic tribes are referred to using one name, for example, Franks or Saxons, thinking of these groups as coherent or homogenous is problematic (as discussed in Chapter I). They often, instead, were a federation of various smaller tribal units that banded together for protection, perhaps from more hostile eastern invaders, or were subjugated by a more powerful tribe whose name was then given to the group as a whole. For example, the Franks, or 'Fierce People,' lived along the Rhine River and included several smaller groups, such as the *Chamavi*, *Chattoari*, *Sicambri*, and *Bructuari*.[38] Likewise, the Saxons, as referred to by the Romans, could have composed several different groups, some of which later migrated across to Britain. As Guy Halsall writes, the Saxons included "the Jutes and 'Angli' recorded earlier as *Eudoses* and *Anglii* by Tacitus… Probably amongst the Saxons' ranks were the Frisians, also attested during the early Empire but unnoticed in written sources between then and the early Middle Ages, and the *Heruli* of Jutland."[39] These confederations of tribes, although

[38] Guy Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, 118.
[39] Ibid., 119-120.

united under one name, did not necessarily remain so; they often broke apart and formed new alliances, became independent, or even fought one another. Both the Saxons and the Franks show up in Gaul, with Saxons settling near Boulogne in Normandy and near the mouth of the Loire River;[40] the Franks, of course, united Gaul under their rule and expanded and contracted their territory under various rulers. Furthermore, the geographical distance between Britain and Gaul ensured that the inhabitants of the two areas would have had some sort of awareness and relationship with one another. Indeed, as was mentioned above, coins from the Franks appear in Britain, and it is argued that these were used as models for the coins that were eventually minted on the island. It is unsurprising, then, that the Saxons appear in the *History of the Franks*, and the changeable nature of the relationship between the two groups will be explored in further detail below.

The nineteenth bishop of Tours, Gregory was born Georgius Florentius on November 30th sometime around the year 539. He was a Gallo-Roman, with family of senatorial rank on both his maternal and paternal sides. He became Bishop of Tours in 573 and served in that position until his death in 594.[41] His *History of the Franks* is an interesting and enlightening look at sixth century Gaul, as he relates much of the intrigue and bloodthirstiness that characterized the politics of that era. He begins well before his own time, however, and Book I of the *History* traces its way through the Old and New Testaments before stopping with the death of St. Martin of Tours. The following books are centered on Gaul, with a parade of ecclesiastical figures and nobility along with much intrigue and warfare. Gregory's personal

[40] Campbell, John, and Wormald, *The Anglo-Saxons*, 37.
[41] Gregory, *History of the Franks*, 7.

knowledge of the events he describes picks up somewhere in Book V and continues through Book X, while Book III and much of Book IV probably came from other sources that were alive to witness the years described.[42] As can be surmised from his position as a church leader, his *History* is related through the lens of Catholicism, and he often uses a figure's perceived piousness and generosity to the church as an indication that they are righteous rulers. Those who, for instance, show respect to St. Martin are represented in a more positive light.[43]

Gregory first mentions the Saxons in Book II, Chapters 19 and 20; he relates that a military leader, along "with his Saxons, penetrated as far as Angers." They go on to raid the city and take many hostages, although the arrival of Childeric, King of the Franks (son of Merovech, who gives his name to the Merovingian dynasty, and father of the inimitable Clovis I) puts an end to the group's destruction. In Chapter 20, he discusses a war between the Romans and the Saxons, wherein the Saxons are described as fleeing from the Romans and being cut down by their pursuers. Later, the Franks, perhaps acting as opportunists and taking advantage of the Saxons' defeat, attacked the Saxons' "islands" and killed many people. Finally, after an earthquake, the Saxons' military leader made peace with Childeric and the two formed an alliance to defeat the Alemanni, who had advanced into Italy.[44] When

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[42] Ibid., 25-31.

[43] Ibid., 152-154, where Clovis refused to allow his men to take anything other than food and water from the land of St. Martin.

[44] Ibid., 132. For a full discussion of these events, see Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, 270-271. According to Halsall, the Saxon military leader mentioned here by Gregory has often been mistranslated (which Thorpe does) as Odovacer, who later deposed the last Western Roman Emperor and declared himself King of Italy. Additionally, he states that it is likely that these Saxons had come from across the sea in Britain, and the islands that are mentioned by Gregory could either be islands in the River Loire, as Thorpe asserts in his

reading these passages it seems as though Gregory is referring specifically and exclusively to continental Saxons, but it is important to keep in mind that this is probably not the case in reality. Because he tends to speak of the Saxons in this passage and others in terms of their movement on the continent it is easy to conceive of them originating solely from there. However, the term Saxons was used to encompass a variety of Germanic peoples, and it is unlikely that Gregory would have been aware of, or at the very least, cared if the Saxons he writes about in his narrative were from Britain. Understanding that the Saxons from Gregory's *History of the Franks* probably included peoples from both the continent and Britain serves as a testament to the complexity of Late Antique ethnic identity. Something about these people was distinct and unique enough for Gregory to understand them as Saxon, regardless of where they came from.

These brief mentions of the Saxons serve to place them within the wider period of instability. The western portion of the empire was in serious decline at this point, and as things began to fall apart, the Germanic tribes on the fringes who had benefitted from their relationship with Rome endured new problems as well as embraced new opportunities. As mentioned already, the various Germanic tribes were not isolated from Roman authority; in fact, much of their society revolved around Roman recognition of power within their tribes, which in turn led to assertions of authority that were depicted in a traditionally imperial manner. As Halsall discusses, there were different ways for the barbarian tribes to approach their relationship with the Roman Empire. The *dediticii* were essentially the equivalent of

translation, or islands off the coast of Gaul. Further, he suggests that it is possible that the Saxons were in the service of the Goths, based on evidence in the Angers Annals.

refugees, those who had surrendered to the empire and been resettled within its borders. The *laeti* consisted of those who were captured by the empire and used to work the land; and the *foederati* were those who were completely beyond the frontiers of the empire and were in a treaty, or *foedus*, with Rome. Finally, some non-citizens did not fit into any of these categories, such as those who served in the army; these people, upon completion of their service and settlement in the empire, became Roman citizens.[45] Once the state ceased to exist, however, the people who looked to Rome to maintain order and provide a framework within which society could function, including the Germanic tribes, were now on their own. They had to find new ways to unify and maintain their states, and one method of accomplishing this was to create a shared ethnic identity. The fact that Gregory refers to distinct groups of Franks, Saxons, Alemanni, and more, indicates that these identities were being utilized and solidified during this period of turmoil.

The Saxons are mostly mentioned in Book IV, beginning with Chapters 10, 13, and 16. Each case deals with their uprising against the Franks, with King Lothar as the ruler who arrived to put down the revolt.[46] Chapter 13, which Lewis Thorpe dates in the year 555, is particularly interesting, because it provides more insight into the nature of the Saxons. Upon hearing that the Saxons "were once more in wild ferment and rebelling against him, for they were refusing to pay the tribute which they were required to pay each year," Lothar marched against them with his army. Saxon messengers were sent to him to plead mercy, offering to pay more than was usually required of them, which Lothar was inclined to accept, saying that

[45] Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, 153.
[46] Gregory, *History of the Franks*, 203, 209-210, and 213.

to attack them "would be a sin against God." However, Lothar's men proclaimed the Saxons to be liars, and demanded a fight. The Saxons asked for peace a second and a third time, offering first one half of their possessions and later "all their clothes, their cattle and the whole of their property," as well as half of their territory, in return for sparing their "wives and little children" and preventing a war from breaking out between the two. Lothar desperately tries to keep his men from declaring war, stating that if they attacked the Saxons they would incur God's wrath and that there was no justice in attacking them when they so desperately sought peace. He finally told his men that if they wished to march, they would have to march without him, and it was only after Lothar was attacked and threatened with execution by his own men that he led them in battle against the Saxons. Perhaps unsurprisingly to the reader after the aforementioned omens, the Franks were defeated, although Gregory does state that there were so many casualties on both sides that it was impossible to make an estimate of their number. Lothar, however, eventually sues for peace, since he did not wish to fight to begin with, and he returns home with what is left of his men.[47]

Gregory later tells us, in Book IV, Chapter 16, that the Saxons "had been stirred up by Childebert and incensed against the Franks."[48] This incident is what prompted Lothar to march out against the Saxons to begin with and led to the above incident. What is interesting about these passages are the ways in which the Saxons are portrayed. They are a serious enough threat that a Frankish king has to march out to deal with them, and able enough that

[47] Ibid., 209-210.
[48] Ibid., 213.

the ensuing fight results in heavy casualties on both sides. Ultimately it is the Franks, and not the Saxons, who sue for peace, which is a little odd, considering the Saxons' initial trepidation about going to war. The next reference to the Saxons is Chapter 42, a rather long passage describing the interaction of the Saxons and a count named Eunius Mummolus. After Mummolus neutralizes the Longobards (Lombards), who were raiding into Gaul, he must deal with the Saxons, who Gregory says had invaded Italy with the Lombards. In 574 the Saxons pushed into the area near Riez and started attacking the nearby villas. Upon hearing about the Saxons' actions, Mummolus raises his army once more and marches against the group, "killing many thousands of them until evening fell and darkness put an end to it." Gregory writes that the Saxons "were not prepared for his assault and did not have the foresight to see what would happen." They prepared for battle, but the next morning messengers passed between the two sides and peace was enacted. The Saxons gave gifts to Mummolus, returned their booty and captives, and returned home. They also agreed to swear an oath to the Frankish king and "make an alliance with him," before they gathered their possessions and families from Italy and began the journey back home. The Saxons split into two groups on the march back, which rendezvoused somewhere near Avignon. There, they stole the harvest from the local peasants, "leaving nothing for those who had labored to produce it." They reached the Rhone River but before they could cross Mummolus arrived once more. He tells them that they must make amends for having "stolen the harvest, killed off the cattle, burnt down the houses and cut down the olive-groves and the vineyards." If they refused, he threatened to wreak vengeance upon all of them; the Saxons, properly cowed, handed over "many thousands of gold coins in payment for what they had done" and

were allowed passage across the river. Along the way, they tricked the local population into trading their goods for bronze bars, which the Saxons colored in some way so as to make them appear to be gold. According to Gregory, "many were deceived by this, ruining themselves by handing over their goods and receiving bronze in exchange," although the Saxons do not appear to have been punished for this, as Gregory makes no mention of any retaliation.[49]

Gregory's stories of the Saxons and their interactions with the Franks provide unique insights into how the Saxons were viewed by a contemporary Germanic tribe, and one which (like the Saxons) forged a new ethnic identity during Late Antiquity. Perhaps unsurprising, as Gregory is writing a history about the Franks and not about the Saxons or the Germanic tribes in general, is the fact that they are mentioned only so far as they cause trouble for the Franks. They seem to be a bit of a nuisance but not any great threat, as their revolts, are apparently put down quite quickly. The periods of peace between the Franks and the Saxons are always disrupted by the Saxons revolting or raiding, sometimes on their own and sometimes along with other Germanic groups. On the one hand they seem quite militant, constantly rising up against the Franks or joining in an alliance with other Germanic tribes against them. In that line of thinking, perhaps it is simply in their nature to want to engage in warfare, as they seem to constantly do so unprovoked. The Franks are then the ones that come in to restore order and peace. On the other hand, Gregory makes the Saxons seem almost timid, as exemplified by their desperate bargaining with the Franks prior to the battle between the two, or their payments to Mummolus to prevent an attack. Notably he does not

[49] Ibid., 236-238.

call them cowards, as he does with the Visigoths (discussed below); they are opportunistic and troublesome for the Franks, who try to maintain control over them, but they are not explicitly depicted as cowards. Further, it is fascinating that he chose to include the story about the bronze bars and the deceit with which the Saxons treated the local population in Gaul on their journey back home. There does not seem to be any real reason for including that bit of information, as the Franks do nothing in response to this bit of treachery. If Gregory chose to write it down, however, he must have found it important in some way: either as a further insight into Saxon nature, or perhaps as a condemnation of Mummolus.[50] Still, Gregory makes no explicit statement regarding how the Saxons are perceived—whether, that is, the Franks see them as cowards, or cheats, or anything else. Regardless, this episode adds another layer into how the Saxons were viewed or utilized by the Franks in their own narratives.

In addition to this, the Saxons are not presented as inherently evil or malicious. They may be at times capitulating, at times opportunistic and perhaps deceitful, but they are not depicted as being innately evil. Although the Saxons were probably still pagans at this point,

[50] Ibid, 413-425. Mummolus first locates the finger bone of Saint Sergius and desecrates it by breaking it into multiple pieces with his knife. Although the pieces are all found, he absconds with one of them without the approval, according to Gregory, of the martyr himself. Later, he betrays Gundovald, who claimed to be the son of King Lothar, to King Guntram in exchange for his own life. However, he himself is betrayed and later killed by Leudegisel, Guntram's Count of the Stables. His wife is interrogated afterwards and all of his riches are confiscated by the king, who shared this wealth with his nephew and the poor. Mummolus sees a gory end, with his wife left destitute and his riches taken by another; although Gregory does not make an explicit statement on his character, he insinuates that Mummolus got what was coming to him. Following this line of thinking, the incident with the Saxons may be more of an indication of Mummolus' character—he allowed the Saxons to walk free across the Rhone and therefore condemned the people of Gaul to ruin—rather than a statement about that of the Saxons.

Gregory makes no mention of their religion, instead focusing on how their movements and actions near Frankish territory affected the Merovingian kingdoms established there. This is not the case for other groups, including the Visigoths. They are specifically called out for their lack of Catholic faith and this is used as a justification for Clovis' violating a treaty between the two of them and taking over their territory in Gaul. Gregory writes about these events in Book II, Chapters 35 and 37. In the first, Alaric, King of the Visigoths, whose kingdom consisted of Spain and extended into southern Gaul, made a treaty with Clovis when he saw that Clovis was conquering people all across western Europe. The two met and "swore eternal friendship" before going "home again in peace." Not long later, however, Clovis, who according to Gregory had converted from paganism to Catholicism only about a decade previously in 496, declared that it was unacceptable that Arians should inhabit a part of Gaul. He and his army march through Gaul, Clovis keeping a close eye on his troops to make sure they did not offend God by desecrating the lands of St. Martin, and eventually defeated the Goths, who were forced back into Spain. Gregory writes that during the battle at Vouillé in 507, "the Goths fled, as they were prone to do, and Clovis was the victor, for God was on his side."[51] These passages explicitly depict the conquering of the Visigoths in purely religious terms, with the heretical and cowardly Goths fleeing from the righteous Franks. Although this is an important part of Gregory's narrative, displaying Clovis' actions in a religious manner and through that, justifying the Franks' place as rulers, it is interesting that he does not find it necessary to do the same thing with the Saxons. Although the Saxons were not yet Christians, Gregory does not place the conflict between the Saxons and the Franks in

[51] Ibid., 152-154.

a religious light, instead leaving motivations and the politics at play behind the battles rather vague.

One of the final mentions of the Saxons as a distinct group is when Gregory is describing their war with the Swabians in Book V, Chapter 15, and their participation in a Breton uprising in Gaul in Book X, Chapter 9. In the first, the Saxons had gone off to Italy with the Lombards under Alboin, and upon returning home *circa* 568-569 were enraged to see that their land had been settled by the Swabians, placed there by Kings Lothar and Sigibert. In a strange incident that mirrored their own confrontation with Lothar roughly a decade previously, the Swabians tried to prevent war with the Saxons by offering first a third of their territory, then half and even two-thirds of it, throwing in control of all the flocks and herds for good measure. The Saxons, however, were determined to go to war, and prepared for battle. They began to argue amongst themselves about how to distribute the wealth they planned to seize, and "God in his compassion, which is the source of all justice, decided otherwise about them." In the ensuing battle, Gregory writes that 20,000 of the 26,000 total Saxons were killed, compared to only 480 of the 6,000 Swabians assembled; rather than accepting defeat, however, the Saxons "swore to a man that they would not cut their hair or trim their beards until they had taken vengeance on their enemy." The second battle resulted in an even worse defeat for the Saxons, and thus the war was ended.[52] In Book X, the Saxons are merely used by Fredegund to try to sabotage Duke Beppolen, whom she hated. He and Duke Ebrachar were sent by King Guntram to put down the Bretons, who were raiding around Nantes and Rennes. The two Dukes, however, jealous and suspicious of one another,

[52] Ibid., 272-273.

began fighting amongst themselves, and instead of relieving the countryside, merely added to the destruction the Bretons were wreaking. A priest offered to show Beppolen where all the Bretons were assembled, under the leadership of Waroch, Count of the Bretons. It was there that the Saxons appear, as Fredegund had ordered them to adopt a Breton appearance and march in support of Waroch. The battle between Beppolen and Waroch (Ebrachar having refused to join the fight until he received word that Beppolen was dead) was long and bloody, with many of the Saxons and Bretons killed during the fighting. Eventually Beppolen was defeated and killed by Waroch, who himself was later defeated by Ebrachar and swore allegiance to King Guntram.[53]

These last references to the Saxons once again places them within periods of unrest. It is intriguing that Gregory offers no other insights into the nature of the Saxons beyond describing a brief few episodes that all began with or resulted in war. He provides more information about others, including the Vandals, the Alemanni, and the Goths;[54] he never provides the name of a leader of the Saxons like he does for these groups, nor does he discuss anything that the group does beyond making war on the Franks, except a brief mention here and there that they had gone elsewhere on campaign before returning to Frankish-controlled territory. Often, though not always, the Saxons are the ones who initiate the fighting, and

[53] Ibid., 556-557.

[54] Ibid., 106-107 and 113-114. The Vandals (under Gunderic) and the Alemanni are described to have seized adjacent territory and begun quarrelling with one another. They eventually decide to settle the disagreement by choosing their best warriors to fight one another, with the loser relinquishing their claim to the disputed area. The Vandals then move down into Spain and further into North Africa before beginning a persecution of Catholics, which Gregory goes into great detail about. The Goths also begin persecuting Christians; both groups are condemned by Gregory because they are adherents of Arian Christianity and not Nicene Christianity.

they often are unwilling to admit defeat, even when it looks them square in the face. It would be easy to draw some broader conclusions about how the Franks saw the Saxons based on the interactions that Gregory relates to us — for instance, that they are militant and unyielding — but these brief glimpses of the Saxons through Gregory's narrative need to be understood in their context. As was mentioned above, the *History of the Franks* is just that: it was not intended to consider each Germanic group in its own right, but rather to examine the Franks and the kingdom they established. Any discussion of other groups would be necessarily colored by this perspective, meaning that ethnic groups will be treated differently throughout the book depending on how Gregory perceived their importance to his overall narrative. Through that, perhaps it can be said that he did not see the Saxons as important to Frankish development as, say, the Goths, who are used as a foil for Clovis' righteousness, or the Vandals, who he lambasts at length for their Arianism. Still, the Saxons were a recognizable, distinct group that interacted with the Franks, primarily causing trouble for them, but they were often off doing their own thing which Gregory either did not know about, or did not find necessary to elucidate. Those episodes he did describe, however, provide unique hints into the development and movements of the Saxons during a period of time when they, like many of the other Germanic groups of Late Antiquity, were forging a new ethnic identity.

The other mentions of the Saxons do not refer to that group by name, but rather to a specific king in Kent who is discussed in much greater detail below. Gregory, however, does not even refer to him as a king, which is curious. In Book IV, Chapter 26 he writes that King Charibert of the Franks had a daughter with his wife, Ingoberg. This daughter, Bertha,

"eventually married a man from Kent and went to live there."[55] Later, in Book IX, Chapter 26, Gregory is discussing the death of Ingoberg, who he went to see on her deathbed during the reign of King Childebert in 589. The very last sentence states that Ingoberg "left a daughter, who had married the son of a King of Kent."[56] Bertha's husband was King Ethelbert, of Kent. It is very interesting that Gregory neither identifies him by name nor by ethnicity, although he clearly would have been aware of both of these things. Gregory seems almost to be detaching Ethelbert from being a Saxon, which begs the question of just what persuaded him to do so. Was he trying to avoid criticizing Bertha, who herself was a devout Catholic?[57] Perhaps it was to avoid criticizing Ingoberg, Bertha's mother, who he describes as a "woman who feared God."[58] More importantly, Gregory writes that Ingoberg "left a legacy to Tours cathedral, another to Saint Martin's church and a third to the cathedral of Le Mans."[59] This seems the most logical reason why Gregory would downplay Bertha's husband, the king of a group of known pagans. What motivation, after all, did he have to depict her husband or her marriage in a negative light, when her mother had given so generously to the churches in Gaul, including his own in the city of Tours? It seems as though, in recognition of Ingoberg's generosity toward the church, including to Gregory's own see, he was careful to avoid any blatant or outright criticism of her daughter.

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[55] Ibid., 219.

[56] Ibid., 513.

[57] Bede, "Ecclesiastical History of the English People," in *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People, The Greater Chronicle, Bede's Letter to Egbert*, edited by Judith McClure and Roger Collins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 39. Bede, at least, depicts Bertha as devout, as Ethelbert was allowed to marry her only on the condition that she was allowed to bring her own bishop, named Liudhard, along with her to Britain.

[58] Gregory, *History of the Franks*, 513.

[59] Ibid.

Gregory of Tours' *History of the Franks* provides a limited but intriguing perspective on how outsiders viewed the Saxons as an ethnic group. Another important outside figure who dealt with the Anglo-Saxons in his literature was Pope Gregory the Great, the man who sent a delegation of missionaries to Britain to convert the Anglo-Saxons. He was born during the mid-sixth century in Rome into a wealthy family that had strong ties to the religious world. His great-great-grandfather, Felix III, was pope from 483-492, and multiple other members of his family entered the ecclesiastical life. Gregory held the office of Prefect of the City of Rome in 573, but the office awoke an anxiety within him that continued to plague him throughout the following years. He felt torn between secular responsibilities and demands and his desire to lead a more meaningful spiritual life, removed from worldly affairs. Ultimately he became a monastic, satisfying for a while his desire to be secluded from secular society. Unfortunately for Gregory, the pope appointed him as a deacon in the Roman Church and later sent him to Constantinople as the pope's representative. There, in spite of his aversion to secular affairs, he made several connections with the nobility and other ecclesiastics and continued to correspond with them after he returned to Italy in 586 or 587. By the time of Pope Pelagius' death in February 590, Gregory was bishop of the city and the expected successor to the office. Although he felt inadequate to the demands of being pope, Gregory waited for approval from the emperor in the east and accepted the office upon receiving it. His distaste for secular affairs continued to haunt him while he held the papacy, and many of his writings reflect upon this idea. In spite of this, he is remembered as one of

the foremost figures of the early church, and his writings provide invaluable insight into how he sought to spread the Christian faith through the pagan world.[60]

In general Gregory adopted a situational approach to interreligious relations and evangelization. Although he tended to follow general guidelines based on what group he was trying to convert—for instance, whether they were Jewish, or pagan, which included Christians who had gone back to or never fully given up their idolatrous ways—he was willing to amend these approaches when the realities on the ground forced him to. As far as the Jewish population, he generally preached that they should be treated fairly, including allowing them to worship unmolested in their synagogues and providing just compensation for any wrongs or debts owed. Gregory generally followed imperial law in protecting Jewish interests, although R.A. Markus does write that he often went beyond the law as written by Justinian, perhaps to even older legislation, to accomplish this.[61] He also expected fair treatment of Christians by the Jews; his biggest concern was that Jews should not own Christian slaves, perhaps to prevent any forced conversions to Judaism.[62] As far as converting Jews to Christianity, Gregory tried to respect the fact that under Roman law, Jews were Roman citizens, and therefore preached a nonaggressive approach. He insisted they should be converted by preaching the word of God and having good examples of how to live Christian lives, that is, Christians who showed kindness and generosity. A threatening approach, by contrast, might scare off potential converts and ultimately hinder the Christian

[60] Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World*, 1-14.
[61] Ibid., 77.
[62] Ibid., 78.

cause. As Markus writes, they were to be won over with "preaching, persuasion, inducements: but no force, no pressure, no coercion."[63]

In Gregory's world, except for Britain, rulers of the Germanic kingdoms that arose after the decline of the western Empire were mostly Catholic Christians, as were their subjects, even if only in name and not necessarily in practice. In many ways Gregory was willing to allow some freedom between the different parts of the Christian world, as long as they did not directly contradict the Christian faith. For instance, he did not see a problem with the Spanish Catholics baptizing by single immersion, which they had adopted to contrast themselves from the Arians, rather than triple immersion, as was the custom of the Roman Church. He followed the general rule that a difference of custom, so long as it did not threaten or deviate from what the faith dictated, was unimportant when considering that the unifying factor between the different parts of the Catholic Christian world was the Christian faith itself. In other words, differing regional customs were insignificant, because those customs were not necessarily what bound the separate regions together; rather, it was their shared acceptance of and reliance upon Catholic Christianity that united them.[64]

Still, problems persisted with paganism, which in Gregory's eyes meant anybody who engaged in idolatrous behavior, whether they were baptized as Christians already or not. As far as converting pagans, there was more of an allowance for using force, although as stated above, Gregory was willing to amend this (as he did for the English) when required. Everyone in a position of authority was responsible for reprimanding and guiding these

[63] Ibid., 79-80.
[64] Ibid., 74.

people to (or back to, as the case may be) Christianity. The bishops were expected to impose penance upon their subjects; landowners, who had a responsibility for their tenants' souls, were to prevent idolatrous behavior on their lands. Likewise, resistant peasants who lived on church lands were to pay such high rents that they would be induced to come into the faith to relieve their burdens. Military commanders and civil officials were also responsible for policing for pagans and making sure they were brought to the faith. Anybody who resisted the bishop's preaching were to be punished: "slaves by beating and torture, freemen by being jailed and subjected to penance."[65] The responsibility, then, for the spreading and maintenance of the Christian faith fell on the shoulders of ecclesiastical as well as secular leaders, who Gregory exhorted to work together to protect and propagate the faith.

One of Gregory's accomplishments, of course, was the establishment of the Anglo-Saxon church. Christianity had been established during Roman times, although little of that influence affected the Anglo-Saxons. Still, Markus points out that Christianity held out in Britain more than Gregory realized, as Ethelbert, the king in Kent, was married to the Frankish princess Bertha, who herself was a Christian and had brought a bishop named Liudhard with her as chaplain.[66] The Christian tradition among the Romano-Britons stretched back at least to the fourth century, when clergymen from Britain attended different ecclesiastical councils on the continent.[67] The spread of the heresy of Pelagius, who "in about 380… went from Britain to the Mediterranean where he preached against Augustine's

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[65] Ibid., 81-82.

[66] Ibid., 178.

[67] Peter Hunter Blair, *An Introduction to Anglo-Saxon England,* 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 127. Three bishops, a priest and a deacon attended a council in Arles in 314; three bishops were also present at the council in Ariminum in 360.

Doctrine of Divine Grace" and the possibility of Pelagianists taking refuge in Britain after the heresy was condemned by the Catholic Church point to a thriving Christian population on the island.[68] The acceptance of the Christian missionaries in Britain and Ethelbert's eventual conversion was the starting point from which the Anglo-Saxon church launched itself, and by the early seventh century the institution was beginning to flourish on the island. Bede's account of how Gregory first became aware of the English is a perfect example of how ethnic identities are constructed by repeating stories that allude to a shared background, a point which will be explored in more detail below. According to Bede, Gregory was so taken with some Angli slave boys he saw in the marketplace in Rome that he likened them to angels, and then proceeded to ask the church leaders in the city to send a delegation of missionaries to Britain, even offering to go himself. Although he was unsuccessful in this initial endeavor, he nonetheless maintained his desire to convert the English and sent his own delegation after he became pope.[69] This is an integral story in the construction of English identity. Later writers, for example Bede, used Gregory's fixation on the Anglo-Saxons, who legend says he saw as 'angelic,' as a way of expressing Anglo-Saxon righteousness and through that, the appropriateness of a single, English identity grounded in Christianity. The fact that one of the most influential church figures of the Middle Ages was determined to convert the Anglo-Saxons was a foundational component in the construction of English ethnicity.

As far as how Gregory viewed the Anglo-Saxons, we must look at his correspondence, much of it to Augustine of Canterbury, who wrote to him often after

[68] Ibid.
[69] Bede, "Ecclesiastical History," 70-71.

establishing the church in Canterbury and was slowly but surely spreading the Roman Catholic faith to the English. Importantly, the Gallic church was a point of communication between Gregory and Britain; indeed, Augustine and his companions, upon their original journey to Britain, went through several different important ecclesiastical centers in Francia, including Vienne, Autun, and Tours.[70]As Bede relates it, Augustine had much freedom in organizing the British Church, mostly by virtue of the fact that the Anglo-Saxons were still new Christians. He instructs Augustine to select those customs from any church that Augustine sees as right in the eyes of the faith, and use these customs to further acquaint the Anglo-Saxons with Christianity.[71] He advises Augustine on a host of other things, including: the acceptability of interfamilial marriages;[72] how to deal with the bishops in Gaul and Britain;[73] and the baptizing of pregnant women, recently born children, and women who have recently given birth, as well as when to allow these people into church.[74] He generally preaches tolerance and a gentle hand, as the English are still new to their faith and should not "be punished for sins which they committed through ignorance, before they received the washing of baptism."[75] In 601 Gregory received a group of ecclesiastics who reported on the progress of the church and were sent back with books, clothing, and a whole host of letters, some of which the monks delivered to Gaul on their journey through that country to Britain. Augustine was authorized to ordain twelve bishops, with London as the metropolitan see of

[70] Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World*, 178.
[71] Bede, "Ecclesiastical History," 43.
[72] Ibid., 44-45.
[73] Ibid., 46-47.
[74] Ibid., 47-52.
[75] Ibid., 45.

the province. York was also given metropolitan status, and the leader there was also allowed to ordain twelve bishops. Primacy between the two was to be determined by seniority. Less than ten years after landing on the English coast, the group of ecclesiastics had firmly established a stronghold upon the island, and Christianity would play a hugely important role in the formation of English ethnic identity from that point onwards.

Among the letters Gregory sent to Britain was one addressed to King Ethelbert himself. In it he implored the King to "zealously" spread the Christian faith among his subjects, to "suppress the worship of idols; overthrow their buildings and shrines; strengthen the purity of your subjects by outstanding purity of life by exhorting them, terrifying, enticing, and correcting them, and by showing them an example of good works." [76] He used as an example the emperor Constantine, who he credited with turning the Roman Empire away from idolatry and into the light of the Christian faith. Gregory also advises Ethelbert not to be alarmed by the signs of the end of times, but rather to use these signs as further motivation for improving his standing as a Christian.[77] He even wrote to Queen Bertha, slightly reprimanding her for missing an opportunity to convert her husband herself. To make up for this transgression, Gregory counsels her to be a model Christian and fully support her husband in spreading the faith to their subjects.[78] The fact that the pope wrote letters directly to Ethelbert, guiding him in the best way to spread the faith, is another important aspect for later writers to grasp. Gregory wrote to Ethelbert in the same way he wrote to the ecclesiastics who had established the Anglo-Saxon church on the island, providing him with

[76] Ibid., 59.
[77] Ibid., 59-60.
[78] Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World,* 182.

advice and guidance in the propagation of the faith. This easy acceptance of Ethelbert as a disciple of Christianity is a result of Gregory's initial fixation on converting the Anglo-Saxons, and the respect he shows the king in his letters informs the later narrative that the Anglo-Saxons were meant to be brought into the faith.

Interestingly, as Markus points out, Gregory seems to be under the mistaken impression, either due to the reports made to him or simply based on his own assumptions, that the king was hindering the progress of the Christian mission in Britain. However, although there may be some truth to this, Markus attributes it to Ethelbert's unique position in a society that was still majority pagan, and one that was hostile to the newcomers who threatened to destroy their way of life. Markus turns to Bede in explaining this: rather than going out and forcefully converting his subjects, Bede describes Ethelbert as "rejoicing at their conversion and their faith" but "compelling no one to accept Christianity," although he did show more favor towards those who converted. In doing this, according to Bede, Ethelbert was following the lessons "from his teachers and guides" who had taught him "that the service of Christ was voluntary and ought not to be compulsory."[79] Although this seems to be directly contradicting the advice Gregory had given Ethelbert in his letter, it seems that upon further reflection the pope did change his mind about how the missionaries should go about evangelizing the population. Gregory wrote a letter addressed to Milletus, one of several additional monks sent with the goods in 601 to Britain to assist with the church's cause, advising him against the destruction of idol temples. Rather, he insists that they simply destroy the idols themselves and consecrate the shrines for Christianity, so that the English

[79] Bede, "Ecclesiastical History," 41.

will be drawn to their original places of worship and therefore be more likely to accept the word of Christ. Likewise he states that they should be allowed to continue hosting their pagan celebrations, although instead of slaughtering cattle in the name of the "devil" they should do so "for their own food for the praise of God."[80] Gregory seemed to understand that the imperial model of evangelization, whereby a Christian ruler coerces his subjects, through force or other means, to convert, was not a valid method of operation in Britain. It shows, as Markus points out, a remarkable ability on his part to understand the situation and mindset of the people he was converting, as well as a flexibility in adapting his approach so that the ultimate goal — the spread of the Christian faith — could be furthered.[81]

Bede's story of how Gregory first became interested in sending a mission to the English insinuates that the pope had maintained the idea for many years before he was finally in a position to launch the expedition to Britain. Although this idea was probably exaggerated later for the purpose of creating a sense of history for the English people as an ethnic group, it is true that Gregory wrote in 599 of a mission which he had "long had in mind." Markus, however, attributes this more to the man's fervent belief and desire to spread the Christian faith than any particular fixation on the English. As Gregory mentions several times in his letters, the end of times was very near, and it was the church's duty to save as many souls as possible before the inevitable judgment day. Therefore the English, who were among the last of the Germanic kingdoms in western Europe to retain their paganism, were the obvious next targets.[82] In spite of this, Gregory's alleged fixation on the English, which would be asserted

[80] Ibid., 57.
[81] Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World*, 184.
[82] Ibid., 186-187.

years later by English writers (including, of course, Bede himself), was used to construct a history that was directly connected to the Roman Catholic church. This idea was an integral component of the English ethnic narrative, and certainly would not have been possible if Gregory had not pursued their conversion so eagerly. Indeed, in his letter to Ethelbert he addressed him as King of the English, although the ethnic divisions on the island (between the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes) were much more complex than this title suggests. The groups saw themselves as distinct from one another, even if Gregory and many other outsiders did not. However, it was during this period that the concept of a single, unified English people began to form, and during the following centuries the idea would be refined through different historical processes and events, bolstered by the literature that the English themselves produced.

CHAPTER III

INTERNAL SOURCES, BEDE AND *OLD ENGLISH ELEGIES*

Now that the Anglo-Saxons have been analyzed through an external lens, we can shift perspectives and begin examining them through their own literature. Before delving into Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* or the *Old English Elegies*, however, we should give a brief overview of Britain, from the time that the Romans left it to the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons. Multiple different groups have inhabited the island and play an important part in the later construction of an English narrative. Some of these, such as the Angles and Saxons, were the basis for the creation of the English identity. Others, such as the Romano-Britons or the Irish, were used as foils against which the English ethnic identity was developed by clearly differentiating these groups from the English.

Roman Britain, officially the Diocese of Britain during the Late Empire, was comprised of four (possibly five) provinces that consisted of the southern part of the island up to Hadrian's Wall. The capital of the Diocese was London, with each province also having its own capital. There were smaller political divisions within the provinces, called *civitates*, which are comparable to modern counties. Each *civitas* had its own capital as well; these cities and towns served as administrative, economic, and political centers within Roman Britain. There was a healthy population of both Christians and pagans, with some suggestion that Christianity was growing and paganism was declining, although the nature of the archaeological evidence makes the interpretation of religion in fourth century Britain

difficult.[83] Additionally, the Diocese consisted of a fairly diverse population, much like the rest of the Roman Empire. By the fourth century, free people born in Britain were considered Roman citizens, and "any division between 'Romans' and 'Britons' had long disappeared."[84] North of Hadrian's Wall were Britons who were outside the Empire's control, and living north of these people were the Picts. While there is some evidence for Germanic immigrants in Britain during the fourth century, they seemed to have existed solely in a Late Roman context: that is, their participation in society was no different than other groups at that time, or at least not enough to significantly differentiate any settlements as noticeably Germanic.[85]

The decline of the Empire in the west was felt early on in Britain, perhaps an obvious result of its geographical distance from the center of Roman administration. Beginning in the last half of the fourth century, bands of Picts and Scots from north of Hadrian's Wall began to raid Roman Britain, destroying many towns. The emperor sent Theodosius to deal with the problem, and he was able to reestablish Roman authority by 368. Throughout the rest of that century and into the very first part of the next Britain went in and out of direct imperial control, with troops siphoned off here and there for other campaigns until Britain was left with few soldiers to protect itself. In the early years of the fifth century, Britain and what soldiers remained supported a series of usurpers in the hope that these men would look out

[83] See Ken Dark, *Britain and the End of the Roman Empire* (Charleston: Tempus, 2002), 18-20 for a fuller discussion of these difficulties. Dark essentially discusses how pagan religions tend to leave more artifacts behind than Christianity. Additionally, to complicate the matter further, it appears that unlike in other areas of the Empire, in Roman Britain Christianity was prevalent among the poor living in the countryside, who by virtue of their socioeconomic standing left fewer artifacts behind in the material record.

[84] Ibid., 15.

[85] Ibid., 15-21.

for British interests and protection. However, two of these men were killed, and the last, named Constantine, "seeking to justify his loyalty to the emperor, crossed over to Gaul, taking with him troops for his support."[86] Britain, left to its own defenses, appealed to Honorius for help; in 410, the emperor replied that they must take care of themselves, and the island was effectively no longer part of the political authority of the Roman Empire.[87]

The next couple of centuries of British history, from 410 until the arrival of Augustine in 597, are difficult to illuminate with any certainty. The series of events that led to the Anglo-Saxons controlling most of the island must be gleaned primarily from sources writing well after this had come to pass, and much of what is known about this period is careful conjecture based on literary and archaeological evidence rather than outright facts recorded at the time. Britain during this period had two sets of invaders with which to contend, the Celtic peoples from the west and the Germanic peoples from the east and south. The Germanic peoples had been raiding the coast of Britain since the third century, and Roman writers generally called them Saxons, although this term was used to encompass a wide variety of ethnic groups rather than truly indicating a single, ethnically unified people. Gildas, and later Bede, who provided more detail to the events described, wrote that the Saxon people who settled in Britain were invited there by a man who Gildas called a "superb tyrant" and who Bede identified as Vortigern.[88] According to their narratives, the Saxons were invited to assist the British in their fight against the northern invaders. The Germanic peoples were given land in exchange for their assistance fighting the northerners, and

[86] Blair, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3.
[87] Blair, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 2-3.
[88] Ibid., 13-16.

eventually, war broke out between the two, with the Saxons ravaging the country. Under Ambrosius Aurelianus the Romano-Britons rallied, however, and at the battle of Mount Badon effectively defeated their foe, some of whom went "home" while others remained in Britain.[89] The complex interplay between these Germanic peoples, the Romano-Britons, and the Celtic peoples (who controlled much of the western part of Britain) during these years, and the events that led to the establishment of Germanic kingdoms in the eastern two-thirds of Britain, are difficult if not impossible to puzzle out with any certainty. Indeed, there may have been no connection between these earliest settlers mentioned by Gildas and Bede and the later rulers of the various Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. However, by *circa* 600, the people known to later historians as the Anglo-Saxons had effectively set up a series of kingdoms on the majority of the island, and it was these people that Augustine of Canterbury was sent to convert.[90]

Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* is an incredibly important text in the formation of an English ethnic identity. Within his narrative he refers consistently to the "English race" or "our race," clearly delineating boundaries between the group he perceives as English, and others, such as the Britons and Irish. The Venerable Bede was born around 672 and entered the monastery at Wearmouth-Jarrow at the age of seven. He was ordained as a deacon when he was nineteen and became a priest when he was thirty; he died on May 25, 735. His *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* "has been seen as the first attempt at a national

[89] Bede, "Ecclesiastical History," 26-29.

[90] See Campbell, John, and Wormald, *The Anglo-Saxons*, 20-22 and 34 for a fuller discussion of these complexities, and 52 for a map of Britain c. 600, including which kingdoms were controlled by the Celts and which were under Anglo-Saxon authority.

history," although this is not what the man himself was intending when he wrote it.[91] Still, the text provides an incredibly useful description of Britain and the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms from the fifth to the mid-eighth centuries, including how Christianity played into the construction of an English identity.[92]

Notably, although not surprisingly, Bede's conception of the English as a unified ethnic group is influenced by his ecclesiastical background. Although he identifies three separate Germanic groups that come to Britain — the Saxons, the Angles, and the Jutes[93] — "to him the English are subsumed in their ethnic variety under a single ecclesiastical government answerable to God."[94] Therefore, although Bede acknowledges the distinct ethnic groups that came to Britain initially, each of them are insignificant subsections of a wider identity that will ultimately unite them as one group: the English. This conception of the English as a single group, while not shared by the various Germanic tribes that established and ruled their own kingdoms in Britain during the fifth and sixth centuries, was not anachronistic for that period of time, although it does represent an outsider's view and not that of the people living in Britain. As was briefly mentioned above, Gregory the Great referred to the inhabitants whom Augustine and the rest were sent to convert as the English,

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[91] *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People, The Greater Chronicle, Bede's Letter to Egbert*, edited by Judith McClure and Roger Collins, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): ix.

[92] Ibid., ix-xiii.

[93] Ibid., 27 and 367. As the editors of this volume discuss, Bede is unique in identifying these three groups as the invaders, but this distinction was a product of his own time (early to mid-eighth century) and not representative of the fifth century when these people came to Britain.

[94]Stephen J. Harris, "An overview of race and ethnicity in pre-Norman England," *Literature Compass* 5, no. 4 (2008), 749. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-4113.2008.00560.x

even addressing a letter to Ethelbert, King of the English. Gregory's conception of the Anglo-Saxons as a single group was influenced by both his place in the Christian world and his distance from the political realities in Britain. Ethnic differences were less important than the overriding fact that the inhabitants were heathens and needed to be converted to Christianity. Although Gregory's view of the English was not an accurate representation of the complex ethnic identities that were asserted and understood in Britain in the fifth and sixth centuries, it does represent how some outsiders conceived of them and, importantly, points to the idea of the English as a unified ethnic group as a concept that was imported to Britain.[95]

Erin Thomas Dailey suggests a figure who might have brought the concept of a single, unified English people, as Gregory conceived of them, to Britain. He discusses how the Germanic peoples who moved to Britain during the fifth century would certainly not have conceived of themselves as a single *gens*, that is, a politically, ethnically, and culturally unified group. Rather, this idea was held by outsiders in Rome, namely Gregory, and might have been transported to the island by Theodore of Tarsus, who was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury in 669 by Pope Vitalian. Theodore "transformed" the religious landscape of Britain; prior to his arrival, Canterbury exercised limited control over the church, and that only in the southern kingdoms. The church in Britain as a whole operated at a very local level, without a sense of unity. Theodore became the overseer of the other bishops and organized the first episcopal council in Britain in 673. He was referred to as "Archbishop of

[95]Erin Thomas A Dailey, "The *Vita Gregorii* and ethnogenesis in Anglo-Saxon Britain," *Northern History* 47, no. 2 (2010), 197. doi: 10.1179/007817210X12738429860662

the English" and "Archbishop of the Isle of Britain." Dailey argues that Theodore would have found it useful to encourage the concept of a shared, English identity as a way of "promoting ecclesiastical unity among the Anglo-Saxons."[96] This ethnic construction was conceived of by outsiders and brought to Britain by Christian missionaries, and the process of blurring the lines of older ethnic identities and promoting the concept of a new, single English identity grounded in Christianity was one way of ensuring a lasting conversion to the faith.

Interestingly, Bede frames the arrival of the Germanic peoples, who he identifies as a combination of Saxons, Angles, and Jutes, as divine punishment for the Romano-Britons, who had become complacent and sinful after their abandonment by the Romans and the incessant raids by the Picts and Scots. This strategic framing justifies the Anglo-Saxons' continuing conquest and dominance of Britain, as they are not simply aggressive invaders, but rather, the group sent to carry out God's will on the island. Indeed, this concept of the Anglo-Saxons as being a sort of 'chosen people' subtly underlies Bede's entire narrative. Gregory the Great's fixation on converting the group and the ways in which Anglo-Saxon Christianity is differentiated from Celtic Christianity represent the Anglo-Saxons in the best possible light. They are so righteous that God uses them as an instrument of his will even

[96] Ibid., 196-197. Although Dailey writes that "Theodore's promotion of a single *gens Anglorum* must remain speculative," the idea that the concept of an English identity was brought to the island by outsiders wishing to promote a new sense of unity based on the Christian faith rings true. Dailey's article examines the importance of the *Vita Gregorii* in the construction of an English ethnic identity for political reasons. This earlier text is often overlooked when examining expressions of English ethnic identity. The text's narrative hinges upon the idea of the English as a single, unified group, with Gregory the Great as the "Apostle of the English," the one that ensured their salvation by sending missionaries to bring them to the faith.

before they are converted to Christianity. Later, Gregory the Great, ecclesiastical leader and pope of the Roman Catholic Church, determines to convert the Anglo-Saxons. Bede, as a churchman himself, placed great emphasis on Gregory's efforts on behalf of the Anglo-Saxons, as it is from these efforts that they were Christianized and primed for the creation of a unified English ethnic identity.

Bede's narrative also contributes greatly to a sense of shared history and background, a vital component in the construction of an ethnic identity. Christianity plays an important part in this aspect as well. This is certainly obvious in the preface to the work, where Bede addresses "the most glorious King Ceolwulf," applauding him for his piety before thanking him for his interest in the *Ecclesiastical History*. He especially notes the fact that the king is taking the time to "learn the sayings and doings of the men of old, and more especially the famous men of our own race."[97] Later, in Book II, Chapter 1, he writes that "we must not fail to relate the story about St. Gregory which has come down to us as a tradition of our forefathers."[98] He goes on in this passage to relay the intriguing and witty play on words that Gregory makes upon inquiring about some slaves for sale from Britain. This incident, according to Bede, awakens in Gregory a long-lasting desire to send missionaries to convert the heathen English which is not realized until he becomes pope. The conversion of Ethelbert in Book II, Chapters 25 and 26, and the multitude of other rulers who convert in the following chapters, all serve to build more layers onto this concept of a shared history.[99]

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[97] Bede, "Ecclesiastical History," 3.

[98] Ibid., 70.

[99] Ibid., 39-41 for Ethelbert's conversion; Book II, Chapter 9, 84-87 for the conversion of Edwin, King of the Northumbrians; Book III, Chapter 2, 119-122 for the conversion of Cynegisl, King of the West Saxons.

With each ruler's conversion they become less distinct from one another and instead enter into a shared English identity that is founded upon Christianity. Their place as members in a Christian world, within Bede's narrative, is more important than other distinctions, and their acceptance of the Christian faith serves to bring them one step closer to being English.

That is not to say that the conversion of a ruler, once it occurred, ensured that his kingdom consequently became Christian immediately, or that it remained that way upon his death. Indeed, after Ethelbert's death, his son, Eadbald, reintroduced paganism into Kent, and it took until 640 for Ethelbert's grandson, Eorcenberht, to order that all the idols in his kingdom be destroyed. Likewise, in East Saxony, Sabert's three sons, none of whom had converted to Christianity, allowed their people to worship idols once more after their father's death.[100] Although Christianity spread across the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in Britain, it did so rather slowly and unstably, as the constant reversion of rulers to paganism, or the legislation issued against it, indicates a stubborn unwillingness on the part of the people to fully and uniformly accept Christianity. William A. Chaney discusses how this led to a syncretism of traditional Germanic pagan traditions with Christian ones, resulting in a unique "neo-polytheism" at times. He goes on to say that these heathen traditions influenced and were influenced by Christianity, partially as a result of the missionary model being adapted for the Anglo-Saxons (when, for example, Gregory advised the Christians not to destroy the Anglo-Saxon places of worship, but rather to consecrate them for Christian use).[101]

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[100] William A. Chaney, "Paganism to Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England," *Harvard Theological Review* 53, no. 3 (1960), 198. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1508400

[101] Ibid., 199 for the mention of "neo-polytheism" and discussion of religious syncretism between Christianity and Anglo-Saxon paganism. Chaney goes on to describe how different, pagan traditions of the Anglo-Saxons persisted even after Christianity arrived

Another important component in Bede's narrative is the ways in which he differentiates the English from the other ethnic groups in Britain. He is clear to identify the Irish and Britons as people entirely separate from those who are a part of the English identity. When he is describing the Britons early on in the first book, he represents them as a weak and needy group who are constantly looking to outsiders for help: first the Romans and later the Germanic tribes who eventually settle in Britain. Although these people were a part of the Roman Empire and therefore Roman citizens, it is significant that Bede chooses to represent the Romans beyond Britain as separate from the Romano-Britons on the island. This plays into his later development of a division between the Britons and the English as ethnic groups. Bede's framing of the Britons throughout *The Ecclesiastical History* is influenced by his animosity and disapproval toward that group in his own time, much of which stemmed from their adherence to Celtic Christianity and not Roman Catholicism. He looks down on them for not converting the Angles and Saxons when those peoples first arrived and settled in Britain, likening it to other "unspeakable crimes" they had committed.[102] Reiterating his underlying belief that the Anglo-Saxons were divinely chosen, Bede writes that "God in His goodness did not reject the people whom He foreknew, but He had appointed much worthier heralds of the truth to bring this people to the faith."[103] Not only is he making a statement about the righteousness of the Anglo-Saxons, he is also making a value judgment about the Britons. It was a 'crime' that they did not even attempt to convert the Anglo-Saxons, but their

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on the island and began to tenuously spread. For example, multiple royal houses in the Germanic kingdoms in Britain claimed to be descended from Wodin.

[102] Bede, "Ecclesiastical History," 36.

[103] Ibid.

version of Christianity was not worthy to be the basis of that group's faith in any case. It took 'worthier heralds'—or rather, *Roman Catholic* heralds—to justifiably and properly bring the Christian faith to the Anglo-Saxons.

Indeed, the concept of emphasizing that the Anglo-Saxons were connected to Roman Catholicism and not Celtic Christianity is an important underlying theme in Bede's overall narrative. As Henry Mayr-Harting discusses, one of Bede's chief purposes when writing *The Ecclesiastical History* was to explain how the English church was ordered, and specifically ordered in the Roman sense.[104] Bede's narrative references several times the tension between the indigenous British church and the Roman Catholic clergy who tried to exert authority over it. In Book II, Chapter 2, he relates a meeting between the British clergy and Augustine. After asking them to submit to the authority and traditions of Rome, the Britons refused, "preferring their own traditions to those in which all the Churches throughout the world agree in Christ."[105] They came back soon afterwards and Augustine told them that they must submit to him in three points: keeping the proper date of Easter, performing baptism, and preaching to the English.[106] The Britons refused, and Augustine warned them that they were doomed to experience death at the hands of the English as a result of their refusal to "accept peace from their brethren."[107] Afterwards, "through the workings of divine judgment," the Britons were set upon by "that very powerful king of the English," Aethelfrith, who "made a

[104] Henry Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd ed. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 42-43.
[105] Bede, "Ecclesiastical History," 72.
[106] Ibid., 73.
[107] Ibid.

great slaughter of that nation of heretics."[108] Clearly Bede is very hostile toward the Celtic Church, as in this passage he shows how they stubbornly refuse to accept the "proper" traditions and ultimately experienced divine judgment for this, once again at the hands of the Anglo-Saxons.

The Easter debate is perhaps the most representative example of Bede's hostility and is useful in examining how he looked down on the Celtic Church. He mentions the fact that the Irish and the Britons observed Easter improperly multiple times throughout *The Ecclesiastical History*, and much of his animosity towards the group seems to stem from this fundamental disagreement. He devotes the entirety of Chapter 25 in Book III to detailing the controversy, relating how a man named Ronan attempted to convince the bishop Finan when to properly celebrate Easter. The disagreement led to a meeting of people from both parties at the monastery at Whitby, where a debate broke out between the Catholics and the Celtic Church. Ultimately the Catholics win the debate and the rulers present decide to follow the "true" and Catholic method of deciding Easter.[109] In Chapter 29 he tells how King Oswiu, anxious for the state of the English Church and knowing that the "Roman Church was both catholic and apostolic" sent a priest named Wigheard to Rome to be consecrated as bishop. Although Wigheard died along the way, Oswiu received a response from bishop Vitalian telling him to keep working for the spread of Christianity. Vitalian also writes that Oswiu "must always follow the holy rule of the chief of the apostles in all things," including the celebration of Easter.[110] Bede's conscious effort to emphasize how the Anglo-Saxon kings

[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid., 152-159.
[110] Ibid., 165.

were adhering to "proper," Roman Christianity rather than the harmful and wrong doctrines of Celtic Christianity is an important underlying theme throughout his narrative. By connecting the Anglo-Saxons specifically with Rome and not with the Celtic form of Christianity, he furthers his case for the Anglo-Saxons' being a divinely sanctioned group.

Later, a certain Caedwalla, king of the Britons, allied with Penda of Mercia and rebelled against King Edwin of Northumbria. After Edwin's death, the two begin ravaging Northumbria. Bede is quick to excuse Penda's actions because he "and the whole Mercian race were idolaters and ignorant of the name of Christ." However, he lambasts Caedwalla, because he was a Christian, at least in name, and spared neither women nor children in his war. Bede writes that "with bestial cruelty he put all to death by torture and for a long time raged through all their land, meaning to wipe out the whole English nation from the land of Britain." Caedwalla's actions, to Bede, are particularly atrocious because he was waging war on his fellow Christians. He goes on to state that even into his own time "it is the habit of the Britons to despise the faith and religion of the English and not to co-operate with them in anything any more than with the heathen."[111] He clearly demarks the line between the English, who are righteous in their faith, and the Britons, who jealously look upon them. He offers little condemnation on Penda the Mercian, and instead focuses his ire on Caedwalla and the Britons as an ethnic group, indicating the hostility he feels towards that group. At the beginning of this narrative, the Britons are lazy, wretched, and weak; here, they are animalistic and brutal. The Britons, along with their version of Christianity, are undeserving of the same respect afforded the English, who adhere to proper Roman Catholicism.

[111] Ibid., 105-107.

Bede also differentiates between the Anglo-Saxons and the Britons in other ways throughout *The Ecclesiastical History*. Early in Bede's narrative the Britons were set upon by the fierce Irish and Picts and because they were "utterly ignorant of the practice of warfare" they appealed to others for assistance.[112] Further, their attempts at protecting themselves after the Romans told them they must look after their own defenses are pitiful. Told to build a wall, they constructed one of turf rather than of stone, as they "had no skill in the work of this kind."[113] The invaders easily trampled down this wall, and the Romans once again came to the rescue of the Britons after they made pitiful appeals for help. This time, however, the Romans told them "that they could no longer be burdened with such troublesome expeditions for their defense."[114] Although a part of the Roman Empire and therefore entitled to its protection, Bede represents the Britons as a nuisance that the Romans must come to deal with periodically until they are weary of doing so. He does not attribute the departure of the Romans to the weakening of the Empire's political hegemony over the west, although he does discuss internal strife that that state was dealing with in the following chapter.[115] Rather, Bede simply makes it seem as though the Romans wearied of protecting the weak and lazy Britons and finally left them to deal with their own problems. Moreover, he writes that their sinful behavior is the reason for the subsequent domination of Britain by the Germanic peoples.[116] Bede's efforts to distinguish between the English and the Britons is an important component of constructing ethnicity. This differentiation between "in-group" and "out-

[112] Ibid., 22.
[113] Ibid., 23.
[114] Ibid., 23-24.
[115] Ibid., 25.
[116] Ibid., 28.

group" members (discussed above), of defining "us" and "them," is integral to creating and developing an ethnic identity.

While Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* can be interpreted as an attempt to construct and assert an English identity that is based upon Christianity, other literature is also important to this construction. One of these is the collection known as the *Old English Elegies*, the authors of which are unknown. These poems are contained within a larger collection called the Exeter Book, which is believed to have been given to the cathedral by Leofric, Bishop of Exeter from 1050 to 1072. The manuscript, which cannot be dated later than 1072, is thought to be a century older than this, probably from sometime between 970 and 990.[117] The dates suggested for the composition of the elegies range from the late seventh to the ninth century.[118] The content of these lyrics are significant when understood in the context of the societies that produced them, especially the "turbulent wars of Northumbrian and Mercian kings, with their attendant destruction of records, and ruin of monuments, of the past."[119] They are often looking backwards to a bygone era, when life was easier or at least more enjoyable, and they seem to reflect on the fleetingness of earthly existence and pleasures. Importantly, too, they incorporate a mixture of Germanic traditions with an appreciation for Rome as well as Christian ideas, all of which are important components in the construction of English ethnic identity.

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[117] Anne L. Klinck, *Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study* (Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 13.

[118] *Old English Elegies*, translated into alliterative verse with a critical introduction by Charles W. Kennedy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1936), 2.

[119] Ibid., 3.

One of these elegies is entitled *The Ruin*, and it is generally agreed that the poem's focus is some sort of Roman structure.[120] The narrator is observing a ruin and reflecting upon the once-glorious spectacle it would have made in the landscape. Vivid imagery describes first the ruin as it appears to the observer, crumbling and fading away, before imagining it in its prime, "Where of old once the warrior walked in his pride/Gleaming with gold and wanton with wine."[121] This poem is important because it mixes both an appreciation for the Romans of the past with the traditions of the Germanic peoples, with its emphasis on feasting and warriors.[122] The attempts of the successor states to connect themselves to Rome during Late Antiquity (discussed above, specifically in reference to the coinage these states produced) is an important and often overlooked component in the formation of English identity. The Anglo-Saxons are generally thought to have developed their ethnic identity differently than the other Germanic kingdoms of the era, that is, without as much emphasis on associating themselves with the traditions of Rome. However, they depicted themselves in an imperial manner on their coinage, copying especially the coins from the Franks who themselves were consciously attempting to increase their prestige and authority by utilizing Roman traditions. In that same vein, the English deliberately associated themselves with Roman Catholicism to differentiate themselves from the Celts and their version of Christianity. *The Ruin* is an interesting melding of Germanic traditions with the perceived might of Rome, all of it stemming from the poet's imagination and indicating a certain appreciation for an era that has long since passed by.

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[120] Ibid., 19. See also, Klinck, *Old English Elegies*, 61-62.
[121] "The Ruin," in *Old English Elegies*, 68.
[122] Klinck, *Old English Elegies*, 62.

Indeed, the poems are characterized by lamenting the passing of time, looking back at a world of riches and glory that has now faded and disappeared. *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* are both prime examples of this. Both discuss how the warriors, the princes and the kings of old are gone, and any who might remain from that time are lonely and lost. The life they once knew is gone, and they are surrounded only by their memories and sadness. These poems also represent a melding of Germanic traditions, this time with Christianity. In *The Wanderer*, the narrator "longs for affection and security" but surmises that they cannot be found in this world.[123] Instead, they advocate turning to God, as life on earth is merely transitory and all the wealth that might be accrued here will cease to exist one day, while the perpetuity of the "heavenly Father" is everlasting.[124] Similarly, in *The Seafarer*, the transience of life is reflected upon, and Anne L. Klinck writes that this poem takes a more noticeably religious perspective than *The Wanderer* does. The narrator discusses how earthly wealth is meaningless, as a person cannot bring it with them into heaven, and their wealth, if they are "burdened with sin," will not assist them in the inevitable hour of judgment.[125] The last section of the poem lays out how to act upon earth, keeping one's eyes focused on God and heaven, which are lasting and permanent, rather than the temporary glory and riches that are to be found on earth. These poems, combining the Germanic traditions of stories of great warriors of old with a relatively new, for the Anglo-Saxons, Christian faith, represent an important attempt to reconcile, or at least to merge, two important components of English identity.

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[123] Ibid., 34-35.
[124] "The Wanderer" in *Old English Elegies*, 51.
[125] Ibid., 61.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

Attempting to piece together the construction of an ethnic identity is often a difficult process by virtue of the inherent subjectivity and fluidity of the concept itself. Modern ethnogenesis scholarship has acknowledged this fact and tried to find ways to accommodate for competing interpretations and assertions of identity. However, frameworks for understanding ethnogenesis in Late Antiquity have generally left out an interdisciplinary approach that pulls from the fields of anthropology, psychology, or sociology. Each of these areas provide a wealth of research on identity formation that can be used to understand and organize the historical processes that occurred during the early Middle Ages. Concepts at the heart of ethnic identity formation, such as conditions for their creation, differentiation between groups, and how and when these identities are asserted are grounded in and expounded upon by research in these fields. It seems a natural enough conclusion to develop frameworks based off of this research as a method of understanding the past, including the ethnic development of the various Germanic peoples of Late Antiquity.

Various internal and external narrative and literary sources provide insight into the ethnogenesis of the Anglo-Saxons as it occurred. Interestingly, through the lens of the Franks as exemplified by Gregory of Tours' *History of the Franks*, the Saxons seemed to be just another Germanic group who occasionally caused trouble for the Franks. They constantly rebel or make war against the Franks, who then have to come out and put down the revolt with their military. The Saxons' reasons for rebelling or raiding, beyond a brief mention here and there, such as their being "stirred up" by Childebert, or off fighting in Italy with the

Lombards and then causing trouble on their way back through Gaul, is left rather vague. Gregory never makes an explicit judgment about the character or nature of the Saxons, although he clearly has no problem with doing this with other "out-group" peoples, such as the Vandals or the Visigoths. The reason as to why he does not treat the Saxons similarly to these other groups can only be guessed at: is it because they were not as useful as foils for Frankish righteousness? Or was it a way to avoid criticizing Bertha, the daughter of Queen Ingoberg, who had gifted quite a large amount of wealth to the church on her deathbed? Since Bertha was married to King Ethelbert of Kent (a Jute, but perhaps seen as a Saxon to Gregory), perhaps Gregory felt it would be in bad taste to make an explicit judgment on the Saxons for fear of appearing to be ungrateful for Ingoberg's generosity. There could very well be other motivations or facts behind Gregory's depiction of the Saxons which have not come down to us through the ages, too, and so the best we can do is attempt to draw some broader conclusions out of his mentions of the Saxons in *The History of the Franks*.

Another important figure, one that would live collectively in the memory of the Anglo-Saxons and is therefore very important to acknowledge when studying that group's ethnogenesis, is Gregory the Great. Whether or not he became determined to convert the Anglo-Saxons after discovering some Angli slave boys in the market, in the late sixth century he sent Roman Catholic missionaries, led by Augustine of Canterbury, to convert them. Gregory's alleged fixation on the Anglo-Saxons was used by later writers, including Bede, to glorify the Anglo-Saxons. Importantly, Gregory also conceived of the Anglo-Saxons as one group, the "English," indicating an outsiders' view of Britain that in no way reflected the complex political and ethnic realities of the island at that time. Regardless, Bede especially

used Gregory as an origin point for the beginning of a shared history for the English. From Gregory's first discovery of their existence in that marketplace until their ultimate conversion to Roman Catholicism years later, Bede makes it clear that Gregory was a key figure in the unification of the Anglo-Saxons into a shared, singular English identity.

Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* is an important text to study for Anglo-Saxon ethnogenesis, particularly because it lays much of the groundwork for the formation of an "English" identity. He is clearly constructing a narrative of the shared history of the Anglo-Saxons, a core component of building an ethnic identity. Much of his conceptualization of English identity rests upon their conversion to Christianity, and specifically Roman Catholicism rather than Celtic Christianity. Bede is hostile toward the Celtic clergy in Britain, to the point that he is does not give them as much credit as he should for their impact in converting Anglo-Saxon rulers and spreading the faith. An underlying theme in his narrative is the idea of the Anglo-Saxons as a chosen people and a useful tool for God to use to punish other groups who Bede saw as idolatrous and heretical, including Celtic Christians. His construction of a shared history throughout his narrative, with Gregory the Great's fixation on the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons as the point of origin for this history, as well as his clear attempts to differentiate between the Anglo-Saxons and others on the island, are all core components in the formation of an ethnic identity.

Lastly, the *Old English Elegies* provide a unique look at the melding of three traditions that were core to the ethnogenesis of many Germanic groups during Late Antiquity: Roman, German, and Christian. *The Ruin*, in which the narrator is examining a Roman building that is crumbling to the ground, combines an appreciation for Rome with the

distinctly Germanic traditions of warriors drinking and making merry. The poem laments the former glory of the building and the people that filled it, as now both entities are long gone. Likewise, *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* both have narrators that reflect upon the glory days when loyal warriors followed their kings into combat and feasted and drank together. However, they implore the reader not to become fixated upon these temporary indulgences, because the physical world does not last. They advise that we should look instead to the afterlife and the almighty Father, both of which are eternal. These final two poems again include Germanic traditions but this time mix them with a noticeably Christian message, with a desire to focus upon the afterlife and spiritual longevity rather than physical wealth.

All of these narrative and literary sources play into a better understanding of the ethnogenesis of the Anglo-Saxons. Seeing how outsiders viewed the group, and combining that with sources from the Anglo-Saxons themselves, provides a multifaceted understanding of their ethnic development. It is clear how a framework derived from anthropological and other research, including creating a sense of shared history and differentiating between "in-group" and "out-group" members, is demonstrated within the above sources. Gregory's distinctions between the "in-group" Franks and other Germanic peoples who he sees as "out-group" are clear in his narrative, although his depiction of the Saxons in this respect remains curious, as he does not clearly separate them from the Franks as he does with others. Perhaps he sees them more as an affiliated group, recognizably separate from the Franks but not enough to warrant their being depicted as evil or dangerous. This could also be why he does not identify Ethelbert by name or as either a Jute or a Saxon. Bede's whole narrative hinges upon the idea of the Anglo-Saxons' common background which ultimately transitions into a

singular English identity. His explicit attempts to distinguish between the Anglo-Saxons and others in Britain, namely the Irish and Britons as well as the Celtic Church as a whole, delineates the boundaries between the Anglo-Saxons and those who he sees as "other."

These frameworks and understandings, however, are not limited in their applicability to the period of Late Antiquity. Modern issues that are tied to ethnic and other identity conflicts can be better understood when looked at with these concepts in mind. Much of the modern problems associated with ethnicity and identity hinge upon the ways in which groups assert these categories. Understanding the processes that contribute to the formation and the continued assertion of these identities means that we can come up with more lasting, efficient solutions to problems associated with them whenever they arise in society. For this reason, it is important not to assign ethnogenesis, or the benefits of understanding the processes that are bound into it, as valuable only in a Late Antique or generally historical context. These forces, which are complex, fluid, and constantly evolving, remain present in the modern world and can cause much strife and conflict between groups. It is incredibly useful, then, to apply this scholarship to more modern issues so that smoother processes of integration and better solutions to conflicts can be created.

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BIOGRAPHY

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